

Advent 2a
December 8, 2019
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

Isaiah 11:1-10 Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19 Romans 15:4-13 Matthew 3:1-12

“Come, Lord Jesus!”

I give thanks this morning to David Lose and the Education for Ministry program, for inspiring the methodology for this sermon.

What is it, friends, that you need to do between now and December 25th? This is the second Sunday of Advent; we are preparing to meet the Christ child So, on some blank space on your bulletin, take a few moments and write down – for your eyes only, with no judgment from us or yourself – what you need to do (what needs to get done) during the rest of Advent. You might need to shop, cook, attend a school concert, study, or make end-of-the-year charitable contributions. Write a few things down rather than simply thinking about them. – ready?

Next: what sort of Christmas do you envision having? Think about your hopes for the holiday, for the day or for the season; and what your fondest hopes are for Christmas.

What will the day be like?

What relationships do you want to be part of?

What kind of a world exists in your hoped-for Christmas?

Isaiah wrote about his dream for a world governed by the will and kingdom of God. In a world of shalom, deep peace:

⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ... ⁹They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;

The root of Jesse stands for the lineage of Jesus; the new ruler of Israel was to come from the family of David, and Jesse was David’s father. What about the stump? With a Jesus-centered life, new life comes from deadened hopes, useless stumps of faith and people. From these very things God grows deep roots and creates a growing life.

- Back to our lists: Work backwards and circle on your list those things that will contribute directly to your hopes and dreams about Christmas and the Christmas world you just thought about.
 - What “to do” items remain help create your world of Christmas, a Christ-centered season?
 - Consider what rises to the top;
 - Discover what might fall off the list.
 - Maybe an action needs to be added.
 - Perhaps most importantly, there are some items that feel very important right now, but contribute little or nothing to your larger vision and hope.

To create the living kingdom of God in this world, we are called to put our energy toward the things that matter the most: God, our families and communities, relationships. Advent repentance is a process of turning away from something and turning toward Jesus. John challenges those who come to the desert not to define themselves or limit their hopes based on their ancestry or piety but rather to dream a larger hope and grander vision and to work toward a better world by “bearing fruits worthy of repentance.”

The hope and vision that you have in mind is what Isaiah describes to us: There really will – and can be – a world in which a lion and lamb will co-exist, side-by-side, without one of them being served on a platter for dinner. A world that peaceful is not centered on you and I; it is a God-centered world in which we each have a part and a role. Every single part of creation matters.

How will we work with our lists in order to bring our hopes and visions to fruition? I invite us all to engage in the holy work of hoping and dreaming about the life of abundance that **God** wants us to have. We might begin a new adventure in which we leave some of our familiar and well-trod paths and venture down another way. Each time we hold up our acquired habits and practices (the to-do lists) and compare them with our deepest hopes and dreams, we are doing the work of Advent preparation and maybe even repentance. Advent is a time still marked by our preparation to receive and share the grace and glory of God as given to us in the baby in Bethlehem, the Word made flesh, Jesus.

So then, Advent repentance is a joyful, if also challenging, activity. Advent is a gift of preparation, of turning our hearts toward Jesus in a joyful hope and practice.

In the Advent days ahead turn your worries, turn your chaos over to God. Rework “the list” into meaningful actions and something that builds up Jesus and the body of Christ. Remember what falls away, and toward what we return.

Expect to find God in someone as outlandish as John the Baptizer: ⁴Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey." Do not be afraid to proclaim Jesus in the ways that suit you. Let your life be transformed.

Dare to prepare in such a way that it is a joy to say, "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus."